

Non-Native Invasive Plants and the Urban Landscape

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Non-native invasive plants are sometimes transmitted by migrating birds, but in most cases, man is the culprit. It may be an ornamental found while on a visit to a tropical island, or, a new species of animal fodder or ground cover (such as kudzu) brought in by the Soil Conservation Service in the mid 1930s. Many of the invasive species were introduced to this country in the 1800s when we were a heavily agrarian society. As we became an industrial society and moved off the farm, we forgot some of these non-native species and they took over the landscape, presenting us with a problem. We are particularly susceptible in the South due to a temperate climate and long growing season, allowing several generations in a year.

The USDA Forest Service publication, *Non-native Invasive Plants of Southern Forests* by James H. Miller, identifies 33 species or groups that are invading the South at an alarming rate. Other invasive plants are identified on the list as of growing concern. Many of these plants are of vital concern since they present a wildfire hazard due to the rate of spread or an unfair competitive edge to our native initial species such as pines and shade-tolerant hardwoods.

Some of the better known non-native tree species (common name, followed by *scientific name in italics*) include:

- **Tree-of-Heaven**, *Ailanthus altissima* (P. Mill) Swingle.
- **Silktree**, *Mimosa*, *Albizia julibrissin* Durazz.
- **Princesstree**, *Paulownia*, *Paulownia tomentosa* (Thunb.)
- **Chinaberrytree**, *Melia azedarach* L.
- **Tallowtree**, **Chinese tallowtree**, **Popcorn tree**, *Triadica aebifera* L.
- **Russian Olive**, *Elaeagnus augustifolia* L.



James H. Miller, USDA Forest Service, www.forestryimages.org



Cheryl McCormick-Rote, Univ of Florida, www.forestryimages.org



Chris Evans, Univ of Georgia, www.forestryimages.org

The tallowtree (shown above in fall and summer) is also known as the “popcorn tree” because of its white berrylike fruit containing seed. The tallowtree berry can be melted down for candles.

A vine and a grass deserving special mention as non-native invasives are kudzu and bamboo. The kudzu vine, as previously mentioned, was brought into this country as a cheap, rapidly growing cattle fodder and ground cover on highly erodible soils. As farms were abandoned, the vine took over, easily topping trees and structures alike. Control of kudzu is done by prescribed burning and the application of herbicide to the exposed crowns. Control can take up to four years. Many’s the young forester who has spent a summer’s afternoon cutting his way out of kudzu wrapped snugly around the rear axle of his pickup!

Bamboo can easily get out of hand in a yard planting or forest cover. The thickness of the grass will prevent herbicide control in a yard planting, or traditional fire control in a forest setting.

Selection of a proper species for a yard planting will eliminate headaches in the future. Be sure to read the label regarding future heights and make sure you are not planting a non-native or invasive plant.

Control of the non-native invasive species in the urban landscape is relatively simple. A list of herbicides can be obtained from your local county forester who should be certified as a pesticide applicator. ☞